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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: PRESIDENTIAL INTERVENTION QUELLS TURF WARFARE AT
ROBERTS AIRPORT

REF: MONROVIA 612

1. (SBU) Summary: Less than a month after Lockheed Martin inked a deal to manage Roberts International Airport (RIA) (Reftel) the President was forced to intervene to clarify the respective roles of the Liberian Civil Aviation Authority and Lockheed Martin. As de facto airport manager, Lockheed Martin will oversee passenger services and screening, meteorology and emergency preparedness. The LCAA, as the regulatory body, is responsible for air traffic control. TSA welcomed the delineation of roles, but cautioned that monumental reforms remain before a direct flight is feasible. As has happened in the past, personality conflicts and power struggles are distracting airport managers from RIA's pressing technical needs.
END SUMMARY.

The President Intervenes

2. (SBU) Only weeks after assuming control of RIA, Lockheed Martin complained to Post that an obstructionist Liberian Civil Aviation Authority (LCAA) hindered the security and safety reforms necessary to ensure direct flights to the United States. Meanwhile, LCAA Director General Richelieu Williams asserted the LCAA maintained the exclusive right to manage crucial security operations at RIA, citing the newly-passed Airports Authority Act and arguing that foreign airport management infringed upon Liberian sovereignty. Lockheed Martin Country Manager James Ebanks privately told Econoffs that Lockheed may be unable to operate profitably in Liberia. He worried the company might discontinue its management relationship with RIA at the conclusion of its six-month contract, if the LCAA was unwilling to work cooperatively to ensure the timely advent of direct flights.

3. (SBU) However, when President Sirleaf summoned LCAA and Lockheed on September 18, after Ebanks urged Post to share his concerns with the President, Lockheed Martin downplayed the conflict and conveyed a more optimistic tone. Nevertheless, President Sirleaf clarified LCAA and Lockheed's respective roles and relationship moving forward. The LCAA retains authority for air traffic control, while Lockheed Martin enjoys exclusive management of passenger services and screening, meteorology and emergency preparedness. All security personnel at RIA now report directly to Lockheed Martin. The President confided to the Charge September 14 her belief that the proper functioning of baggage handling and passenger screening will be central to TSA's decision to approve a direct flight to the United States. Consequently, such responsibilities reside with Lockheed Martin.

4. (SBU) Ebanks told Econoff October 15 that since the President's intervention, relations between Lockheed and the LCAA have improved dramatically, and Lockheed Martin no longer entertains the possibility of withdrawing from Liberia. While minor conflicts continue to emerge, most recently over who had the right to negotiate a contract with Ethiopian Airlines to establish flights to RIA (septel), he claims the President seems prepared to mediate at every turn. He added he has met with her four times since their first meeting and now speaks to McClain regularly.

Assisting Liberian Aviation

¶6. (SBU) Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Aviation Security Sustainable International Standards Team (ASSIST) conducted an interim assessment September 20-25. TSA praised LCAA's progress on access control measures, including the new IDs visible on the majority of personnel, but cautioned LCAA that minimum standards required to accommodate a direct U.S. flight remain months away.

¶7. (SBU) TSA, working with Lockheed, established short and long-term objectives in 16 critical areas. Easy fixes such as enforcing the prohibited items list in sterile areas were expected to be accomplished within seven days. However, the revision and implementation of the draft National Training Program's comprehensive training and certification schedule may take months. Overall, TSA was encouraged by RIA's progress and found a cooperative and engaging partner in Lockheed. TSA plans to send an ASSIST delegation every month until early next year, continuing work on training, safety and security, and plans to embark on a National Quality Control program that will ensure compliance and proper implementation of operational procedures and legislation in the near future.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) Turf warfare has been a drag on reforms at RIA. In late 2008 and early this year, management of RIA and LCAA jockeyed for authority, politicizing airport operations and delaying the hard work of reform. With the resignation of his RIA rival in February and the passage of the Airports Authority Act in August, Williams appeared set to cement his authority, and may have felt that President

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Sirleaf's desire to give Lockheed Martin full de facto control of the airport constituted a threat to LCAA's primacy. Williams' and Lockheed's current claims to enjoy a cooperative and fruitful relationship, if true, should accelerate the reforms necessary to ensure direct flights. However, TSA will judge the substance of LCAA and Lockheed's putative cooperation during its October 25-29 visit.

¶9. (SBU) With the Lockheed-LCAA relationship back on track, and the Executive Mansion willing to intercede when necessary, Post will recuse itself from future disputes. Instead, Post's interventions will be based on the principle that safety and security reforms at the airport will increase the likelihood of any international flights and improve the overall business climate in Liberia. This includes stepped-up efforts to stop human and other trafficking at the airport. More generally, the President's ongoing and active mediation between Lockheed and LCAA exemplifies her chronic inability to delegate, or risk deputies failing to implement her vision.